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The Horror of Mimesis

David Young Kim

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1. For a contemporary account of Hayez's exhibition, see Ignazio Fumagalli, 'Esposizione degli oggetti di Belle Arti nell'I.R. Palazzo di Brera', *Biblioteca italiana, ossia giornale di letteratura, scienze ed art*, vol. 75, July–September 1834, pp. 312–17. In addition to briefly commenting upon the dramatic import of the slave's decapitation, Fumagalli states that the painting offers 'un fedel ritratto de' costumi orientali e maomettani' as well as a depiction of the luxury and decadence of Ottoman court. On Hayez's painting, see Francesco Hayez, Palazzo Reale and the Accademia Pinacoteca Biblioteca di Brera, Milan, 1983, pp. 173–4; Fernando Mazzocca, *Francesco Hayez: Catalogo Ragionato* (Federico Motta Editore: Milan, 1994), pp. 236–7.

2. Ridolfi describes the episode as follows: 'Fecegli ancora altre pitture, ed in particolare la testa di S. Giovanni nel disco, il quale come Profeta e reverito da Turchi, e recatala al Rè lodò la diligenza usatavi, avvertendolo nondimeno d'un errore, che il collo troppo sopravanzava dal capo: e parendogli, che Gentile rimanesse sospeso, per fargli vedere il naturale effetto fatto à se venire uno schiavo gli fece troncar la testa, per la cui barbarie intimorito Gentile, tentò ogni modo di tantoso licentarsi, dubitando che un simile scherzo un giorno à lui avvenisse'. Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte; ovvero Le vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato*, Detlev Freiherrn von Hadeln (ed.), vol. 1, 2 vols (G. Grote: Berlin, 1914–1924), pp. 57–8.

3. Ridolfi, *Le Maraviglie*, p. 58.

4. In Marco Boschini's 1660 biographic poem of Gentile Bellini, Sultan Mehmed II also executes a slave, not for the purposes of demonstrating

In 1834, the history and portrait painter Francesco Hayez exhibited a composition at the Brera which bore the following title: 'Gentile Bellini, accompanied by the Venetian *bailo*, in the act of presenting to Sultan Mehmed II his painting, in which is depicted the beheaded St John the Baptist' (Fig. 1).¹ The descriptive caption refers to an apocryphal vignette in Carlo Ridolfi's biographies of Venetian painters, *Le maraviglie dell'arte* (1648).² Having travelled from Venice to Istanbul, Gentile Bellini astonishes the Sultan with his portraits, canvases that, as Ridolfi declares, verge on becoming breathing figures. The vignette then takes a proverbial bad turn: Gentile next paints for the Sultan a head of St John the Baptist. Although praising Gentile's diligence, the Sultan points out an error: the neck protrudes too much from the head. Gentile remains doubtful towards the Sultan's assessment. And so to display how such a severed head would appear in life, 'il naturale effetto' as Ridolfi puts it, Mehmed II has a slave beheaded for the artist's benefit.³

The distress and agitation evoked by Hayez's nineteenth-century painting, an emotional turbulence originating in Ridolfi's seventeenth-century anecdote, might be understood to reside in the figure of the 'cruel Oriental despot'.⁴ At the epicentre of the surrounding commotion – the abject slave kneels to the left and to the right, Gentile tightly grasping the frame of his deficient painting – reclines Sultan Mehmed II. His odalisque-like posture embodies a nonchalance that only heightens the terror at this scene of irrational cruelty. Yet the horror lurks not just in the figure of the Sultan who can order an execution seemingly with a mere turn of the hand. What propels this emotion is the Sultan's portrayal of that classic villain of the horror genre, the overreacher. Like the mad scientist or necromancer, Frankenstein or Hyde, Mehmed II oversteps the boundaries of propriety to achieve a certain ideal, in his case, naturalistic portrayal. It is as though Ridolfi's Sultan seeks to refute the charge, stated for instance in Lodovico Dolce's *Il Dialogo della pittura* (1557), that Islamic civilisation eschewed images altogether.⁵ In displaying his perverse dedication to realistic image-making, the Sultan turns that evidence of 'civilised habits', namely painting, into an example of Ottoman barbarity.⁶ Mimesis, understood in the present discussion as the stylistic effect of heightened verisimilitude, becomes Mehmed's merciless objective. And horror is the spawn of this ambition.⁷ In the push and pull that characterises the precariousness of existence, the horror of mimesis threatens the viewer who is secure, albeit only temporarily, on the 'other' side of death.



Fig. 1. Francesco Hayez, *Gentile Bellini, Accompanied by the Venetian bailo, in the Act of Presenting to Sultan Mehmet II His Painting, in which Is Depicted the Beheaded St. John the Baptist*, 1834, oil on canvas, 56.6 × 78 cm. (Photo: Private collection. Akg-images/De Agostini Picture Library/A. degli Orti.)

Horror as a Critical Term

Mimesis and horror? Upon first glance, this may be an unlikely pairing. In early modern Italian art literature, the word *orrore* can arise not only in the face of monsters and other bizarre creatures conceived by the artist's fertile imagination. Horror – involuntary screams, shudders, the prickling of the flesh – arises from an excess of and excess interest in mimesis. But what justifies a focus on the term and concept of horror as opposed to the spectrum of words related to the sensation of fear (*spavento*, *terrore*, *timore*, *paura*, and especially *terribilità*)? This question is well taken and in response it should be stated that the present discussion offers but a preliminary examination on the dark 'underside' of the theoretical landscape in the early modern period.⁸ As invaluable as studies on terms as *aria*, *grazia*, and *ordine* may be, they nevertheless can be unwittingly marshalled to defend, shield, and prevent scholarship from even entertaining the notion of an 'irrational Renaissance'.⁹ Eugenio Battisti's magisterial study *L'anti-rinascimento* (1962) and recent inquiries into the themes of monsters and artistic license have done much to sketch out a more nuanced view of the Renaissance's theoretical landscape.¹⁰ Ranieri Varese, for one, has questioned why Battisti's work is an 'invisible book' in Renaissance art history.¹¹ Other recent

natural effects, but rather due to fruit missing in his orchard. The Sultan is subsequently described as a 'Neron crudel'. Marco Boschini, *La carta del navegar pitoresco*, Anna Pallucchini (ed.) (Istituto per la collaborazione culturale: Venezia, 1966), p. 51. Gérôme would later associate the Orient with profuse decapitation in his well-known painting *Heads of the Rebel Beys at the Mosque of El Hasanein, Cairo* (1866) in which he depicted his critics in Paris as the beheaded. See Gerald M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme: with a Catalogue Raisonné* (Harper & Row: New York, 1986), pp. 71, 218.

5. Lodovico Dolce, *Lodovico Dolce's L'aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*, Mark W. Roskill (ed.) (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2000), pp. 116–17: 'Ma di questa parte non accade dire altro, se non che, fra' costumi barbari degl'infede li, questo è il peggiore, che non comportano che in fra di loro si faccia alcuna imagine di pittura né di scultura'.



Fig. 2. 'Involuntary movement' in René Descartes's *Traité de l'homme* (T. Girard: Paris, 1664).

6. Lodovico Dolce, *Lodovico Dolce's L'aretino*, pp. 116–17: 'È ancora la pittura necessaria per ciò, che senza il suo aiuto noi non avremmo (come s'è potuto conoscere) né abitazione né cosa alcuna che appartenga all'uso civile'.

7. Given the range of connotations in the *mimesis*-family of terms, especially in classical sources, it seems reasonable to circumscribe the meaning of *mimesis* as applied to the works of art described in the early modern sources subject to the present analysis. In several of these cases, *mimesis* is understood to function as the term that encapsulates the artist's attempt to achieve a lively naturalistic representation on behalf of the beholder, invariably the patron. The period phrase of *al vero* is certainly a viable alternative. However, this phrase is not as satisfactory due to its frequent juxtaposition with the operations of artistic fantasy and invention, a fundamental aspect to images of horror. On *mimesis* in classical sources, see Göran Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art: Studies in the Origin and Early Development of an Aesthetic Vocabulary* (Svenska Bokförlaget: Uppsala, 1966). On the connotations of the phrase *ad vivum*, see Claudia Swan, 'Ad vivum, near het leven, from the life: defining a mode of representation', *Word & Image*, vol. 11, no. 4, October–December 1995, pp. 353–72.

8. For a consideration of the issues of conquest and destruction in the period, see Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2003).

9. This is not to say that art theoretical studies have overlooked how early modern art terminology engages the disorderly and strange. See the discussion of *bizzaro*, *terribilità*, *pellegrino* to name but a few terms in, respectively, Roland Le Mollé, *Georges Vasari et le vocabulaire de la critique d'art dans les 'Vite'* (Université Stendhal –

treatments of horror in this period, such as David del Castillo's engaging examination of the macabre and preternatural in Spanish early modern culture, originates from literary, as opposed to strictly art historical concerns.¹²

Part of the overly ordered view of this period is the emphasis, even prejudice, aesthetic vocabulary places upon actions of the mind as opposed to those of the body. Terms such as *imitatio* or *idea* can trace their classical roots, for instance, to the highly cerebral actions of the artist envisioning an image in his mind or judiciously selecting models. By emphasising the authority of such terms, one implicitly posits the artistic process and the effects of art themselves as residing solely in the intellect. Examination of spontaneous and bodily responses to phenomena, aesthetic or otherwise, often received more attention in works without a strict art theoretical orientation, such as Descartes's *Traité de l'homme* (1664) which explored among other issues, involuntary movement (Fig. 2).¹³ Like the figure in Descartes's treatise whose hand touches a flame, horror is a concept that short circuits the connect between the eye and rationalising mind, diverting that signal to awake involuntary reactions.

From their very inception in classical usage the terms *horror* and *horridus* deal with the senses, the haptic, the grasp of the physical, often tactile world. For Roman authors, *horridus* often describes the encounter with texture, an entity that is bristly or prickly. Cicero in his speech defending Marcus Caelius Rufus deploys the word to bring to mind those 'scruffy beards which we see upon ancient statues and paintings' in his attempt to imagine the interlocutors of old-fashioned morals.¹⁴ Connected to this is the term *horripilatio*, the standing up of the hair, which the Vulgate uses to render an admonishment found in the *Sirach* or *Ecclesiasticus* of Ben Sira (27.15): 'The speech that sweareth much shall make the hair of the head stand upright . . .'.¹⁵ A common example of horripilation found in the natural world was of course the porcupine. The Byzantine man of letters Manuel Philes in his anthology of poems on the properties of animals compares the prickly creature to an archer when fearful (Fig. 3).¹⁶

The word *horror* itself describes the sheer bodily, or even instinctive reaction of shaking chills or quaking with fear, shuddering, and shivering. In the *Aeneid* (3.19–48), Virgil recounts that Aeneas uproots some leafy boughs upon a shore to prepare a sacrifice. These seemingly benign roots begin to trickle with black blood and soon the earth is covered with human flesh belonging to the murdered prince of Troy, Polydorus. 'A cold horror' – *frigidus horror* – shakes Aeneas's limbs and freezes his blood with terror.¹⁷ In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 14, we read of Polyphemus, rendered in a mid-sixteenth-century translation as a contorted figure reminiscent of the Laocoön feasting on limbs (Fig. 4). Ovid relates that Polyphemus's face, the open wound bereft of his only eye and the vomiting of human flesh and wine mixed with phlegm seizes Achaemenides with a ghastly horror: 'horror – trembling seized me, looking at that face'.¹⁸

This link between ingestion and the reaction of horror underscores all the more the visceral and physical register that horror can occupy. Yet horror as a keyword with a powerful semantic valence is not exclusive to classical literature alone. A variant of the term appears in Cesare Cesariano's 1521 translation of Vitruvius in the passage (1.1.6) that narrates the origins of the caryatids. In building the Persian colonnade, the Spartans 'arranged images of their captives in barbaric costume . . . so as to sustain the roof, such that their enemies might shudder (*si horresseno*) out of fear of their strength'.¹⁹ Though Cesariano and Vitruvius both apply *horrescere* to describe an



Fig. 3. 'Concerning the Porcupine' in Manuel Philes, *De animalium proprietate* [early 14th century], fol. 37r., 1564. Written by Angelus Vergecius. (Photo: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.)

overwhelming sense of fear in the wake of defeat, other early modern writers on the visual arts did not pass over the word's affiliation with texture. In Filarete's treatise on architecture (Book 7), the Doric temples such as those dedicated to Hercules, Hera, Minerva, and Mars are constructed with 'severe, bitter and rough (*orribili*) stones, that is to say not with too much labour or grace, but rather dark and rough (*orrendi*)'.²⁰ This connection between darkness and the horrid also emerges in Alberti's treatise *On Painting*. Here, however, the word is scourged with a negative connotation which may explain the reluctance of later art historical scholarship to delve into the term with more courageous aplomb. 'With experience by painting', Alberti declares, 'we learn as time goes by to hate work that is dark and horrid (*atrum et horrendum*), and the more we learn, the more we attune our hand to grace and beauty'.²¹ He affirms this opposition between the aesthetic goal of beauty and its antithesis in the horrid with a call for vigilance expressed via an urgent passive periphrastic: 'the way in which it is easier to go wrong must be firmly blocked (*obstruenda est*)'.²² In contrast, Leonardo had no qualms about briefly marshalling the horrible in his comments about the portrayal of tempests at sea or battle scenes.²³

What is more, it is significant that *orrore* receives lexical attention in the most significant art theoretical work from the early modern period, namely Giorgio Vasari's multivolume biographies of artists, *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri* (1550/1568). Horror for Vasari is a device to aid and quicken the visceral impact of the depicted upon the viewer. This occurs not only in the domain of the monstrous or the



Fig. 4. 'Polyphemus devouring Ulysses' companions, as narrated by Achaemenides' in *Del Metamorphoseos*: abbreviato, con la rinovazione d'alcune stanze, libro decimoquinto, con figurato (Lyon: s.n., 1549), page 183, plate 171. (Photo: Warburg Institute.)

Grenoble 3: Grenoble, 1988), pp. 155, 161; David Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1981), pp. 234–41; Philip Sohm, *Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001), p. 187.

10. For the most recent edition of Battisti's work which provides updated bibliography and notes, see Eugenio Battisti, *L'antirinascimento* (N. Arago: Torino, 2005).

11. Ranieri Varese, 'L'antirinascimento': un libro "invisibile", *Arte lombarda*, vols 110–11, no. 3–4, 1994, pp. 70–4.

12. David del Castillo, *Baroque Horrors: Roots of the Fantastic in the Age of Curiosities* (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2010).

13. To be sure, Descartes, for all of his emphasis upon the involuntary aspects of movement, stresses the mechanistic nature of spontaneous response, a view most eloquently expressed in his comparison of the human body to a musical organ. On the reception of Descartes in the thinking of Claude Perrault and later French natural scientists and architects, see Antoine Picon, *Claude Perrault, 1613–1688, ou, La curiosité d'un classique* (Picard Édition: Paris, 1988), pp. 75–88.

14. Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 14.33: 'non hac barbula, qua ista delectatur, sed illa horrida, quam in statu is antiquis et imaginibus videmus . . .'

15. Ecclesiasticus 27.15: 'Eloquella multum iurans horripilationem capiti statuet et inreverentia ipsius obturatio aurium'. English translation taken from the Douay-Rheims Bible.

16. Manuel Philes, *De animalium proprie tate* (Apud Guiljelmum Stouw: Trajecti ad Rhenum, 1730), pp. 224–6. See also Philes, *Le proprietà degli animali II/Manuele File*, Anna Caramico (ed.) (Accademia pontaniana: Naples, 2006). Note that in his treatise on physiognomy, Della Porta also mentions the standing up of the hair and the prickling of the flesh due to horror and fear. Giovan Battista Della Porta, *Della fisionomia dell'uomo*, Mario Cicognani (ed.) (Guada: Parma, 1988), p. 421: 'Quelli che hanno i capelli dritti nel capo sono paurosi, e si riferiscono alla passione; perché coloro che han gran paura se gli drizzano i capelli nel capo, come dice Aristotele nella *Fisionomia* . . . Dice Alessandro Afrodisio che i peli per l'orrore e per la paura sogliono drizzarsi'.

17. Virgil, *Aeneid*, vol. 3, p. 29: 'mihi frigidus horror/membra quatit, gelidusque coit formidine sanguis'. Among the visual depictions of Aeneas's discovery of Polydorus include the *Vergilius Vaticanus* (Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, Rome; Vat. lat. 3225), fol.24v and later glosses on this model found in a sixteenth-century manuscript of the *Aeneid* (Junius Morgan Collection, Princeton University), fol. 35r. On the Vatican Vergil and its reception, see David H. Wright, *The Vatican Vergil: a Masterpiece of Late Antique Art* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1993).

18. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, vol. 14, pp. 198–99: 'me luridus occupat horror/spectantem vultus'. On allusions to Ovidian poetry in early modern painting, see Michael Thimann, *Lügenhafte Bilder: Ovids favole und das Historienbild in der italienischen Renaissance* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 2002); Viktor Kommerell, *Metamorphosed Margins: the Case for a Visual Rhetoric of the Renaissance Grottesche under the Influence of Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Olms: Hildesheim, 2008).

19. Cesare Cesariano, *Di Lucio Vitruvio Pollione de architectura libri* (Gottardo da Ponte: Como, 1521), 6v: 'Et ivi li simulacri de li captivi vestiti con barbarico ornato, la superbia de le meritevole contumelie punita, a substinere il tecto li han collocati acio li puniti inimici per timore de la loro fortitudine si horresseno et li citadini, aspicienti lo exemplo di quella virtute, per la gloria erecti a difendere la libertate sua fusseno parati'.

20. Filarete, *Trattato di architettura*, Anna Maria Finoli and Liliana Grassi (eds), (Il Polifilo: Milan, 1972), p. 187: 'Usavano gli antichi tre ragioni da chiese, o vuoi dire templi, secondo dice Vitruvio

frightening, but also in the arena in which the painter sets out to achieve naturalistic effects. To put it another way, horror is placed in the service of mimesis.

Vasari's forging of horror and the immediately visceral, specifically the sensation of taste, occurs as he recounts Piero di Cosimo's 'strange, horrible, and unexpected invention' for a procession featuring the Triumph of Death.²⁴ Just as bitter food can please us, Vasari states drawing from Aristotle on tragedy, so too can horrible things (*le cose orribili*).²⁵ Elaborating upon this statement, Vasari proceeds to set down details of the macabre car in a wildly ekphrastic mode:

This was the Car of Death, worked on by him (Piero di Cosimo) most secretly in the Sala del Papa, so that not a single thing about it could be pried upon, but it was seen and known about at the same time. This triumph consisted of an extremely large car drawn by buffalo, all black and painted with bones of the dead and white crosses, and above the car was Death, very large at the summit with a scythe in hand; and around the car were many tombs with their lids, and in all the spots where the triumph halted for the performance of songs, these tombs opened and from them arose some clothed in black cloth, on which were painted all the bones of a skeleton on their arms, chest, flank and legs, such that with the white above that black, and appearing from afar some with torches with masks which had a death's head front and behind and upon the throat as well, aside from seeming to be a most realistic thing, was horrible and terrifying to see.²⁶

Aside from the macabre imagery itself – the Figure of Death grasping a scythe, the mass of skeleton costumes – what also contributes to the horrific effect is the event's staging. The jarring transition from Piero furtively toiling in the cloister of Santa Maria Novella to unveiling the car heightens the drama of suddenly exposing this spectacle to public view. Adding to this dramatic impression is the car's size – note Vasari's repeated use of the superlative *grandissima* to refer to the dimensions of the chariot and Figure of Death. Furthermore, the spectacle presented is not static but is rather a 'living image', a multi-sensory event, from the sound of the dirges, the car's motion, the sight of the illuminated torches in the distance, to the non-sensical and therefore terrifying movement of corpses/zombies.²⁷ What is more, Vasari's eye shifts dizzily from detail to pan-shot, registering as he does the layout of single body parts on the costumes, the sharpness of bones and the scythe as well as contrasts in both colour (black/white) and substance (massive beasts/skeletons). The excess of detail and description function as a compensatory strategy. Words fail to describe, much less contain, the horrible.

Piero di Cosimo's chariot was an ephemeral creation. As Denis Geronimus observes, how this production appeared may be gleaned by seeking out relevant comparanda.²⁸ Consider the following engraving currently attributed to the Master of the Vienna Passion (Fig. 5).²⁹ Much as Piero's procession must have done, the engraving uses modes of direct address, in this particular case, the blunt use of a perspectival grid and a mass of heaving muscular beasts trampling over corpses – among them a pope, cardinal, king, and warriors in armour – all thrust into the foreground. But however horrific this scene may be, it nevertheless discloses its status as a dynamic allegorical image: it personifies death, rendering the invisibility of death visible and representing its willing and unwilling victims. Piero's triumph of death in addition to this engraving convey horror as a staged event, a coordinated accumulation of disparate elements – sets, costumed actors and so on which verge on excess. Nonetheless, the artificiality of such scenes,

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Fig. 5. Master of the Vienna Passion, *The Triumph of Death*, from the *Triumphs of Petrarch*, engraving, 19.8 × 24.3 cm. Albertina, Vienna. (Photo: Albertina.)

their ontological status as *invenzioni*, could be understood to remove them from the domain of reality.³⁰

The operation of horror, however, would grudgingly concede such neat distinctions between the allegorical and the real. From a theoretical point of view, Vasari suggests that accentuating the effect of horror was the quality of naturalism – he in fact deploys the superlative *naturalissima* – of Piero di Cosimo's macabre decorations. Furthermore, from a historical perspective, the Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani reports that upon the occasion of one Triumph of Death in 1304, the festivities 'with men disguised as demons, horrible to behold' gave way to actual deaths: the Carraia bridge supporting the crowd collapsed, 'wherefore many were killed and drowned . . . so that pastime from sport became earnest'.³¹ Such instances raise the question of whether horror is exclusively dependent upon the artist's *fantasia* or inventive powers, an accumulation of effects. For Vasari also mobilises the term *orrore* to portray the unruly penetration of the fictive world into lived experience.³²

Smashing Alberti's Window

Indeed, Vasari suggests that the disintegration of the Albertian window that looks onto yet keeps separate another world is responsible for the horror and eventual death of Spinello Aretino. Vigorous at the age of 92 and unable to keep still even after having executed a number of frescoes for the Campo Santo in Pisa, Spinello undertakes a commission to paint scenes from the life of St Michael and the Fall of the Angels for the Compagnia di Sant'Angelo in Arezzo.³³ Carlo Lasinio's nineteenth-century print offers an overall view of the now dismantled fresco. Displayed towards the bottom is the figure of

che facevano una certa ragione di tempî, gli quali gli dedicavano a Ercole ed Era, Minerva, e a Marte, e questi chiamavano dorici, i quali facevano severi, aspri, di pietre orribili, cioè non con troppa diligenza di lavori, neanche in vachezza, ma più presto oscuri e orrendi'.

21. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture*, Cecil Grayson (ed.), (Phaidon: London, 1972), p. 90: 'Natura enim ipsa indies atrum et horrendum opus usu pingendi odisse discimus, continuoque quo plus intelligimus, eo plus ad gratiam et venustatem manum delinitam reddimus. Ita natura omnes aperta et clara amamus'.

22. Alberti, *On Painting*, p. 90: 'Ergo qua in parte facilius peccato via patet, eo arctius obstruenda est'.

23. Leonardo, *Trattato della pittura*, Angelo Borzelli (ed.) (Carabba: Lanciano, 1947), p. 28: 'Se tu, poeta, figurerai la sanguinosa battaglia, si sta con la oscura e tenebrosa aria, mediante il fumo delle spaventevoli e mortali macchine, miste con la spessa polvere intorbidatrice dell'aria, e la paurosa fuga de' miseri spaventati dall'orribile morte'. See also p. 149: 'Vedesi l'aria tinta di oscura nuvolosità negli apparecchi delle procelle, ovvero fortune del mare . . . come spaventate dalle percussioni degli orribili e spaventosi voli de' venti . . .'

24. Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori: nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi (eds) (Sansoni: Florence, 1966–1987), vol. 4, p. 63: 'Fra questi, che assai furono et ingegnosi, mi piace toccare brevemente d'uno che fu principale invenzione di Piero già maturo di anni, e non come molti piacevole per la sua vaghezza, ma per il contrario per una strana e orribile et inaspettata invenzione di non piccola soddisfazione a' popoli. . .'. On Vasari's portrayal of Piero di Cosimo as an eccentric, see Louis Alexander Waldman, 'Fact, Fiction, Hearsay: Notes on Vasari's Life of Piero di Cosimo', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 82, no. 1, March 2000, pp. 171–9.

25. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, p. 63: 'ché come ne' cibi talvolta le cose agre, così in quelli passatempi le cose orribili, purché sieno fatte con giudizio et arte, diletano maravigliosamente il gusto umano: cosa che aparisce nel recitare le tragedie'. For a recent examination of the intersection between artistic and culinary cultures in early modern Italy, see John Varriano, *Tastes and Temptations: Food and Art in Renaissance Italy* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2010).

26. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, p. 63–4: 'Questo fu il carro della Morte, da lui segretissimamente lavorato alla sala del Papa, che mai se ne potette spiare cosa alcuna, ma fu veduto e saputo in un medesimo punto. Era il trionfo un carro

grandissimo tirato da bufoli, tutto nero e dipinto di ossa di morti e di croce bianche, e sopra il carro era una Morte grandissima in cima con la falce in mano; et aveva in giro al carro molti sepolcri col coperchio, et in tutti que' luoghi che il trionfo si fermava a cantare s'aprivano e uscivano alcuni vestiti di tela nera, sopra la quale erano dipinte tutte le ossature di morto nelle braccia, petto, rene e gambe, che il bianco sopra quel nero, et aparendo di lontano alcune di quelle torce con maschere che pigliavano col teschio di morto il dinanzi e 'l dirieto e parimente la gola, oltra al parere cosa naturalissima, era orribile e spaventosa a vedere . . .

27. On the notion of festival processions and celebrations as 'living images', see Philine Helas, *Lebende Bilder in der italienischen Festkultur des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Akademie Verlag: Berlin, 1999).

28. On Piero di Cosimo's decorations for the Triumph of Death with references to prints and panel painting depicting comparable Petrarchan themes, see Denis Geronimus's account of the artist, *Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2006), pp. 18, 20, 29–30.

29. On the Triumphs of Petrarch and the Master of Vienna's rendering of the Triumph of Death, see Mark Zucker (ed.), *The Illustrated Bartsch, Early Italian Masters* (Abaris Books: New York, 1980, 1993), vol. 24, pp. 96–7 and vol. 24, Commentary, Part I, pp. 37–43.

30. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, p. 64: 'et ancora in que' vecchi che lo videro ne rimane viva memoria, né si sazano di celebrare questa capricciosa invenzione'.

31. Giovanni Villani, *Villani's Chronicle, Being Selections from the First Nine Books of the Chronicle Fiorentine of Giovanni Villani*, Rose E. Selfe (trans.) (E.P. Dutton and Co.: New York, 1907), pp. 360–1. Cited and discussed in Geronimus, *Piero di Cosimo*, p. 30.

32. This crossing of boundaries, the pollution of another world into our own is a pattern that persists even in recent films subscribing to the horror genre. In the versions and adaptations of Hideo Nakata's *The Ring* (1998), for example, the mere viewing of a videotape can cause people to die of fright and in one pivotal scene, the ghost of a murdered girl crawls through the television to kill the viewer.

33. On Spinello Aretino's oeuvre, see Stefan Weppelmann, *Spinello Aretino und die toskanische Malerei des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Edifir: Florence, 2003).

34. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 2, p. 287: 'Convenutosi poi del prezzo con chi ne aveva la cura, finì tutta la facciata dell'altar maggiore, nella quale figurò Lucifero porre la sedia sua in Aquilone, e vi fece la



Fig. 6. Carlo Lasinio after Spinello Aretino, *La caduta degli Angeli ribelli*. *La Chûte des Anges rebelles*, 1821, engraving, 39.1 × 46.5 cm. London, British Museum. (Photo: Trustees of the British Museum.)

Lucifer already transformed into as Vasari calls him, a 'most hideous beast' (Fig. 6).³⁴ Yet as is well-known, neither Lucifer's visual characteristics alone, nor the overall ensemble of winged monsters plummeting from the heavens draw the bulk of Vasari's attention. Vasari comments instead upon the physical effect of this painted figure upon the health of the artist himself:

And it pleased Spinello so much to make him [Lucifer] horrible and malformed, that it is said (so great at times is the imagination) that the said figure painted by him appeared to him in a dream, asking him where he had seen him so ghastly and why he had mocked him so much with his brushes, such that having awoken from his sleep by fear, not being able to scream, he shook with the greatest tremor in such a way that his wife, having herself awoken, came to his aid; but nonetheless having strained his heart he was thus in danger of suddenly dying due to such an accident, even though, briefly living for a while crazed and with staring eyes, he was eventually lead to his death.³⁵

As Daniel Arasse shows in his seminal work on the topic, a detail, in our case the figure of Lucifer, can provoke a reading which can widely diverge from the global message of the painting at large.³⁶ For Vasari, the horror evoked by Lucifer does not solely relate to the narration of the Apocalypse.³⁷ Isolated from his place in a complex composition, the detail of this fallen angel serves as the main prop in staging how horror can transpire from an artwork that becomes too real, running away from the grasp of the controlling and rational artist. To be sure, Vasari here is playing with the trope of the animate work of art, the painting that appears so true to life that it only lacks breath or speech.³⁸ But Spinello's painting is cheeky in its realism. So animate is this devil that he not only talks, but talks back. Lucifer goes so far

as to *complain* about his appearance as rendered by the artist himself. So viscerally affecting is this Lucifer that Spinello responds to these questions through shaking and trembling, with Vasari's breathless and alliterative prose accentuating and accelerating the drama towards its tragic outcome. Moreover, at his death Spinello embodies horror himself. We might conjecture that the artist's half-crazed appearance is itself horrible to witness, the assonance in the phrase 'con occhi tondi poco tempo' orally replicating the shocked look of his dilated eyes.³⁹

This intersection between horror and liveliness recurs throughout the *Lives* in relation to two widely different artists: Berna Sanese and Giulio Romano. In both of these cases, the chain between horror and expressions such as *al vero* is not only forged – the link is made all the more fast through the use of intensifying language that agitates Vasari's prose. For instance, Vasari relates that the artist known as Berna Sanese paints in S. Agostino in Siena a now-lost fresco cycle that depicted:

... a youth pale from the fear of death being lead to execution, imitated so well and close to life that he [Berna] deserved the highest praise... and it well seems that in this work Berna so imagined this horrible incident, full of bitter and cruel terror; he rendered it so lively with his brush such that the same thing having transpired in reality would not evoke greater feeling.⁴⁰

Here, the effect of horror is enhanced by, or even predicated upon, the act of imitation that approaches excess, or to point out Vasari's string of intense adverbial phrases, 'so well... so close to life... so lively'. This language of stressed naturalism or, more precisely, naturalism under stress in the face of horror emerges once again in the description of Giulio Romano's fresco decorations for the Palazzo del Te in Mantua. Of the room with the celebrated depiction of the Fall of the Giants, Vasari declares:

Let no man think of seeing from a brush a work more horrible or terrifying, nor more natural, since whoever finds himself inside there, seeing the windows and the mountains and the buildings collapse together with the Giants, he will not doubt that these things and the buildings will crumble upon him...⁴¹

Vasari's exhortation and the rhetorical flourish of a tricolon (*più orribile o spaventosa né più naturale*) enhances the painting's capacity to collapse its horrifying scene upon the viewer. Such is Giulio Romano's naturalism, however mannered, that what results is an eradication of boundaries, the unruly entry of the fictive world of the painting, crashing upon the beholder's space and even onto beholder himself.

Horrible Models

The biographical accounts of Filippo Lippi and Perin del Vaga also contain passages that yoke the vocabulary of horror and vivacity, descriptions of serpents breathing fire and poison, scenes of drowning which approach the extremes of vivacity.⁴² But these instances constitute but an overture. For elsewhere in the *Lives*, the vectors of mimesis and horror converge such that the artist's model itself – that prized referent to nature – becomes transformed into an object of horror itself. One of the more memorable examples in this regard is Leonardo's head of Medusa. The tale is well known: Piero, Leonardo's father, asks his son to paint a buckler for one of his peasants. Made from fig wood and severely warped, the buckler is

rovina degl'Angeli i quali in diavoli si tramutano piovendo in terra, dove si vede in aria un S. Michele che combatte con l'antico serpente di sette teste e di dieci corna, e da basso nel centro un Lucifero già mutato in bestia bruttissima'.

35. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 2, pp. 287–8: 'E si compiacque tanto Spinello di farlo orribile e contraffatto, ch'è' si dice (tanto può alcuna fiata l'immaginazione) che la detta figura da lui dipinta gl'apparve in sogno domandandolo dove egli l'avesse veduta sì brutta e perché fattole tale scorno con i suoi pennelli, e ch'egli svegliatosi dal sonno per la paura, non potendo gridare, con tremito grandissimo si scosse di maniera che la moglie destatasi lo soccorse: ma nientedimanco fu perciò a rischio, strignendogli il cuore, di morirsi per cotale accidente subitamente, benché, ad ogni modo, spiritaticcio e con occhi tondi poco tempo vivendo poi, si condusse alla morte'.

36. See Daniel Arasse, *Le Détail. Pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture* (Flammarion: Paris, 1992), pp. 145–94.

37. On this issue, see Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: the Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2005).

38. The problem of liveliness in early modern painting has recently received a great amount of scholarly attention. See Frank Fehrenbach, *Licht und Wasser: zur Dynamik naturphilosophischer Leitbilder im Werk Leonardo da Vincis* (E. Wasmuth: Tübingen, 1997); Fredrika Herman Jacobs, *The living image in Renaissance art* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2005); Victor I. Stoichita, *The Pygmalion effect: from Ovid to Hitchcock*, Alison Anderson (trans) (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2008) and the research project 'Art, Agency and Living Presence in Early Modern Italy' (2006–2010) conducted at Leiden University.

39. One might even conjecture that Spinello Aretino's portrait in profile as represented in the woodcut in the 1568 edition of Vasari's *Lives* conveys this sense of shocked petrification insofar as artists' eyes are deeply inset, with their roundness accentuated by surrounding zones of curvilinear hatching lines. Even so, the general impression of the portrait is one of an aged artist. On the woodcut portraits in the *Lives*, see Wolfram Prinz, *Vasaris Sammlung von Künstlerbildnissen: mit einem kritischen Verzeichnis der 144 Vitenbildnisse in der zweiten Ausgabe der Lebensbeschreibungen von 1568* (L'Impronta: Florence, 1966).

40. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 2, pp. 253–4: 'Era nella chiesa in una faccia—oggi per farvi cappelle guasta—una storia: dentrovi è un giovane menato a la giustizia impalidito dal timore della morte, imitato sì bene e simigliante così al vero che ben



Fig. 7. Flemish, *Head of Medusa*, first half of the seventeenth century, oil on panel, 49 × 74 cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi. (Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, NY.)

meritò somma lode; era accanto a costui un frate che lo confortava molto bene atteggiato e condotto. E ben parve in questa opera che il Berna si immaginasse quel caso orribile, pieno di acerbo e crudo spavento, perché e' lo esprime sì vivamente col suo pennello che la cosa stessa apparente in atto non moverebbe maggiore affetto'.

41. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 5, p. 72: 'Erano i Giganti grandi di statura, che da' lampi de' fòlgori percossi ruinavano a terra, e quale inanzi e quale a dietro cadeva a quelle finestre, ch'erano diventate grotte overo edificî, e nel ruinarvi sopra i Giganti le facevano cadere, onde chi morto e chi ferito e chi dai monti ricoperto, si scorgeva la strage e la ruina d'essi. Né si pensi mai uomo vedere di pennello cosa alcuna più orribile o spaventosa né più naturale: perché chi vi si trova dentro, veggendo le finestre torcere, i monti e gli edificî cadere insieme coi Giganti, dubita che essi e gli edificî non gli ruinino addosso'.

42. Of Filippino Lippi's frescoes in the Canto al Mercatale in Prato, Vasari writes: 'Et in questa opera fra l'altre cose dimostrò arte e bella avvertenza in un serpente che è sotto a S. Margherita, tanto strano et orribile che fa conoscere dove abbia il veleno, il fuoco e la morte; e il resto di tutta l'opera è colorito con tanta freschezza e vivacità che merita per ciò essere lodato infinitamente'. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 3,

straightened in a fire and made smooth by a turner. Leonardo then paints an image even stranger and more deformed than the buckler's initial misshapen appearance. His purpose in doing so, Vasari recounts, was to terrify the viewer, producing the same effect as Medusa's head:

To achieve this effect Leonardo therefore brought into a room, where he did not enter if he was not alone, lizards, green reptiles, crickets, serpents, butterflies, locusts, noctule bats and other strange kinds of similar animals, from the multitude of which, variously assembled together, he brought into being a beast, very horrible and terrifying, which poisoned with its breath and made air into fire; and he had it emerge from a rock, dark and craggy, breathing out poison from its open throat, fire from its eyes and smoke from its nose, so aberrantly that it appeared to be a monstrous and horrible thing: and he laboured so much in making it, that in that room the stench of the dead animals was overly raw, though it was not noticed by Leonardo due to the great love he bore towards the task.⁴³

This vignette was evocative enough to have been associated with the seventeenth-century Flemish depiction of Medusa given to Grand Duke Ferdinando II 'de Medici' (Fig. 7).⁴⁴ The painting focuses upon the horror of Medusa itself, in particular upon the mass of writhing and biting serpents that threateningly swarm in the foreground. The Vasarian anecdote, however, stresses the horror of the working conditions, the process undertaken to realise this monstrous creation. Leonardo toils in a secluded chamber, its isolation and exclusivity marked by an adamant double negative (*non entrava, non solo*). It foreshadows the chaotic alchemists' workshops, strewn with esoteric books and instruments, as depicted by such seventeenth-century

painters as Adrian van Ostade or David Teniers II, and later on the mad scientists' quarters.⁴⁵ Inside Leonardo's laboratory, within the compressed space of these four walls, there teems a veritable menagerie – creatures coming from land and air, with and without wings, four or six legged or without limbs at all, not to mention an assortment of skin textures, from scales, exoskeleton to fur. Leonardo differs from early modern naturalists in their attempt to map out precisely the morphology of these creatures. Instead, he uses the disordered process of *mescolanza*, or unruly mixing with license, to create this *animalaccio*.⁴⁶ Composed of various human and animal parts, Horace's monster as described in the opening lines of his *Ars poetica* elicited laughter. But in the case of Leonardo's creation, the surplus of variety leads to horror.

Disorder undergirds the principal source of tension, if not heightened drama, in this passage. There is the overwhelming liveliness of Medusa's head – note how Vasari invigorates and quickens his word portrait of the Gorgon with a battery of imperfect verbs, restless gerunds and alliteration (*scura e spezzata, sí stranamente*), not to mention a perverse Petrarchan delineating of the poisonous throat, eyes and nose that make up this monstrous whole.⁴⁷ Yet, in contrast with this terrifying liveliness is the reek of the once-teeming menagerie which has spoiled into a heap of putrefying creatures. Vasari does not refer to this smell as the neutral *odore* or even the stronger *puzza*. He deploys the word *mordo*, a term that slides between referring to a terrible smell and pestilence. This is a reference to miasma, the belief that smell or the foul breath of plague victims could convey disease.⁴⁸ To take but one illustration of this concept, the crouching male figure in Marcantonio Raimondi's print after Raphael of the *Plague in Crete* (*The Morbetto*) pinches and covers his nose, protecting himself against *mal'aria* (Fig. 8).⁴⁹ But unlike this figure who separates himself and the child from his plague-stricken mother, Leonardo both causes and withstands *mordo* in the service of a higher ideal, namely artistic creation.

Artists' compulsion to have models actually suffer so as to depict suffering itself elicited commentary and censure in the wake of the realistic ideals campaigned by Caravaggio, his followers, and the Bamboccianti.⁵⁰ Pietro Testa, for instance, criticises those painters, bereft of memory, and imagination, who require a 'literal' model. To depict blood reflecting in a dying captain's armour, Testa declares, artists should not require the ensemble before their very eyes.⁵¹ This criticism of artists' dependence on models had a classical pedigree. In Seneca the Elder's *Controversies*, an imaginary compilation of legal cases, we read of the accusation that to depict Prometheus, Parrhasios tortured an old man captured at Olynthos to death in order to possess a suitable model (10.5).⁵² No one, argues Seneca, has the right to drown persons to represent a shipwreck. Parrhasios had not painted Prometheus – he had in fact made him.⁵³

Such is the case in Vasari's biography of the fifteenth-century painter Francesco Bonsignori where the aesthetic quality of naturalism becomes aligned with and demands the effect of horror itself. Vasari adopts a more equivocal, even approving position towards the use of horrific techniques to achieve mimesis. In one memorable episode, Vasari describes Bonsignori's painting of a Saint Sebastian – still *in situ* in the sanctuary of the Beata Vergine Maria delle Grazie in Curtatone – following the advice of his patron, Federico Gonzaga II, Marquis of Mantua (Fig. 9).⁵⁴ Like Ridolfi's Sultan Mehmed II, the Marquis critiques Bonsignori's naturalistic portrayal. He states that the limbs as drawn from his model, a porter, do not resemble



Fig. 8. Detail from Marcantonio Raimondi after Raphael, *A Plague scene*, 1512–1516, engraving, 194 × 250 mm. London, British Museum. (Photo: Trustees of the British Museum.)

p. 562. A similar conjunction between horror and vivacity occurs in Vasari's description of Perin del Vaga's frescoes for the Palazzo Doria in Genova. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 5, p. 141: 'Similmente in cielo tutti gli Dei, i quali nella tremenda orribilità de' tuoni fanno atti vivacissimi e molto proprii, secondo le nature loro; oltra che gli stucchi sono lavorati con somma diligenza, et il colorito in fresco non può essere più bello, attesoché Perino ne fu maestro perfetto e molto valse in quello'.

43. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, p. 21: 'Portò dunque Lionardo per questo effetto ad una sua stanza, dove non entrava se non e' solo, lucertole, ramarri, grilli, serpi, farfalle, locuste, nottole et altre strane spezie di simili animali, da la moltitudine de' quali variamente adattata insieme cavò uno animalaccio molto orribile e spaventoso, il quale avvelenava con l'alito e faceva l'aria di fuoco, e quello fece uscire d'una pietra scura e spezzata, buffando veleno da la gola aperta, fuoco dagli occhi e fumo dal naso sì stranamente, che e' pareva monstrosa et orribil cosa: e penò tanto a farla, che in quella stanza era il morbo degli animali morti troppo crudele, ma non sentito da Lionardo per il grande amore che e' portava alla arte'.

44. Documents attest that the painting, covered with a shot silk curtain and decorated with a smooth ebony frame, entered the Medicean Guardaroba Generale on 18 August 1668. The painting was given to Grand Duke Ferdinand II by Filippo de Vicq whose uncle Ippolito de Vicq of Bruges had been in service of Ferdinand II for well over 30 years. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the painting was associated with the buckler painted by Leonardo until its Flemish authorship was identified in the early twentieth century. See Valentina Conticelli (ed.), *Medusa: il mito, l'antico e i Medici* (Polistampa: Florence, 2008), p. 66, for a thorough catalogue of previous



Fig. 9. Francesco Bonsignori, *Saint Sebastian*, ca. 1510, oil on panel, 215 × 120 cm. Curtatone, santuario della Beata Vergine Maria delle Grazie.

bibliography which traces the painting's attribution from 1782 onwards. On Rubens's celebrated rendition of the Medusa, see *Rubens in Vienna, The Masterpieces*, Liechtenstein Museum, Kunsthistorisches Museum and Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Vienna, 2004, pp. 222–7, no. 50. See also Susann Koslow, 'How looked the Gorgon then. . . The Science and Poetics of "The Head of Medusa" by Rubens and Snyders', in Cynthia P. Schneider et al. (eds), *Shop Talk: Studies in Honor of Seymour Slive* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1995), pp. 147–9. I am grateful to Edward Wouk for discussing these references with me.

45. On the representation of alchemists' laboratories, see Sandy Feinstein, 'Horsing Around: Framing Alchemy in the Manuscript Illustrations of the *Splendor Solis*', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 37, no. 3, Fall 2006, pp. 673–99. On the depiction of working spaces in seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting, see Katja Kleinert, *Atelierdarstellungen in der niederländischen Genremalerei des 17. Jahrhunderts: realistisches Abbild oder glaubwürdiger Schein?* (Michael Imhof Verlag: Petersberg, 2006).

46. Commentary upon this monstrous combination of like and unlike emerged in a diverse range of fields in early modern thought, from debates concerning poetics to architectural discourse. See Alina A. Payne, 'Mescolare, Composti and Monsters in Italian Architectural



Fig. 10. Circle/School of Filippino Lippi, *A Seated Man and a Standing man (St Sebastian?), Nude and Bound*, 1472–504, Metalpoint, heightened with white, on blue-grey prepared paper, 207 mm × 288 mm. London, The British Museum. (Photo: Trustees of the British Museum.)

the truth since 'they do seem not to be pulled by force, nor show that fear one ought to imagine in a man, bound and shot with arrows'.⁵⁵ There is an implicit connection between Bonsignori's task and his goal, between depicting a man – *ritrarre dal naturale*, and representation of being pulled by force – *tirare per forza*. Paul de Man provocatively noted that forays into philology, attending to the particular turns of tone, phrase and figure, can lead one through the 'screen of received ideas' to reveal the unexpected.⁵⁶ In this instance, it is indeed suggestive that early modern sources, such as John Florio's *New World of Words* (1611), group under the term *TIRARE* tugging, flinging, and hurling along with the acts of drawing and portraying.⁵⁷ Pointing out this kinship between *ritrarre* and *tirare*, between portraying and 'dragging with violence' as the Crusca defines *tirare*, this interwoven philological network calls attention to the potentially disturbing connotations of mimetic portraiture.⁵⁸

Of course, binding models was not uncommon for depictions of martyrdom, prisoner, or crucifixion scenes, as some drawings suggest (Fig. 10).⁵⁹ But binding only goes so far. For as Gonzaga observes, in Bonsignori's painting, there is a rift between the act of portraying and the necessary effect of *tirare per forza*, a gap that points to a correlation, even a prescribed equivalence between the two. How, then, can the painter traverse the gap between portraying and the aim of depicting force? To bridge this rift, the Marquis conspires to help Bonsignori achieve optimal naturalistic effects. Just after the artist binds his model and is about to portray him, the following incident occurs:

The Marquis then, rushed out from a room in a fury with a loaded crossbow, ran up to the porter, screaming at the top of his voice: "Traitor, you are dead, I have caught you where I wanted" and other similar words; hearing the poor porter this and thinking himself for dead, in wanting to break the ropes with which he was bound, in struggling against them and being completely frightened, [he] truly represented one about to be

shot with arrows, showing in his face the fear, and horror of death in his limbs, strained and distorted, seeking to flee from danger.⁶⁰

The larger claim of this passage is that mimesis can – it must – coexist with horror if it is to be convincing. Like the subject of a gruesome scientific experiment, the porter needs to be bound, pulled, and shocked to produce the desired effect. Comparable with Alberti's praise of a depiction of the dead Meleager whose hands, fingers, and neck all convey lifelessness, so too does the porter convey 'horror of death' in all of his members.⁶¹ Additionally, the desire to generate the horrific effects of representation perverts the relationship between artist and patron. Of course, we might consider the interaction between the two – Gonzaga's presence in the studio, the employment of familiar speech – as evidence of the rise of the early modern artist.⁶² But under the sign that binds *ritrarre* and *tirare*, this interaction slides from gentility's pedestal, descending instead into the pit of complicity. The two Franciscos are accomplices in this amusingly cruel plot.

It would be overstating the case, however, to burden this anecdote alone with the weight of proving the kinship between horror and mimesis. Another thread of argumentation, evoking Seneca the Elder's *Controversiae*, might call attention to Bonsignori's need to have such a literal and tortured model in the first place. Recognising this requirement would ultimately undercut Bonsignori's artistic prowess, and notably Vasari passes over this potential objection in silence. The bulk of his attention is directed instead to staging a dramatic vignette. Yet, this in turn raises another complication that involves the text's rapport with its corresponding painting. Vasari's scenography and his tense prose – the elongated sentences – leave the reader gasping for breath, the train of gerunds and gnarled alliterative phrases – *stiracchiate e storte* – accentuating the image of the body struggling against the ropes.

What we encounter in the image itself is a rather tranquil Saint Sebastian that recalls placid classical sculptures rather than a figure writhing in pain (Fig. 9). This raises the question of whether Vasari examined the painting in the first place, despite his documented journey to Mantua and its environs in 1541.⁶³ Consequently, if one were to privilege the painting itself as the chief object of analysis, one could easily dismiss Vasari's anecdote as another instance of overwrought fictional narration based most likely on the information concerning Bonsignori and other Northern Italian artists provided by Fra Marco de' Medici.⁶⁴ Yet, this would be tantamount to relegating one of the more urgent objectives of art literature in the period, namely conceiving or even defining the work of art as that thing which compels elaboration and speculation upon the process and desired effect of representation.

However large the chasm between word and image appears in this vignette, the 'after-reading' of the anecdote awakens some degree of sensitivity to the horrific connotations that lace an image as benign as this. For instance, details in Bonsignori's docile work, such as the slightly foreshortened arrow piercing the saint's left arm, suggest the horrific potential of seemingly innocuous pictorial conventions such as perspective. These elements can be understood to inhabit the same spectrum as a specific feature in Mantegna's *Martyrdom of St. Christopher*. Here, the arrow that punctures the King of Lycia's eye calls attention to the horrific application of perspective and foreshortening, an effect all the more amplified by the pergola that drills through the architectural skin (Fig. 11).⁶⁵ The presence of the arrow motif raises another question: does the subject of mimetic portrayal need to be affixed, killed even, to guarantee the realisation of naturalistic effects, as

Theory of the Renaissance', in Luisa Secchi Tarugi (ed.), *Disarmonia, brutezza e bizzarria nel Rinascimento* (Franco Cesati: Florence, 1998), pp. 271–89.

47. On the issue of the defining the body as a whole made of interdependent yet fragmented entities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Nancy J. Vickers, 'Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 2, Winter 1981, pp. 265–79.

48. Miasma also accounted for various measures taken by doctors who in the time of plague wore masks inserted with cleansing herbs in their beaks or covered their noses during medical examinations. On air as a medium for contagion, Vivian Nutton, 'The Reception of Fracastoro's Theory of Contagion: The Seed That Fell among Thorns?', *Osiris*, 2nd Series, vol. 6, *Renaissance Medical Learning: Evolution of a Tradition*, 1990, pp. 196–234. On the classical origins of the concept of miasma, see Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1996).

49. On the role of imagery in depicting and immunising the viewer against disease, see Sheila Barker, 'Poussin, Plague, and Early Modern Medicine', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 86, no. 4, December 2004, pp. 659–89. Vasari, Cellini and other early modern writers on art employ the term *mal'aria* when referring to plague. See David Young Kim, '"Bad Air! Bad Air!" Artistic Mobility and "Influence" in Italian Early Modern Art Theory', in Uwe Fleckner et al. (eds), *Der Künstler in der Fremde. Wanderschaft – Migration – Exil* (Akademie Verlag: Berlin, forthcoming).

50. Elizabeth Cropper, 'Michelangelo Cerquozzi's Self-Portrait: The Real Studio and the Suffering Model', in Victoria von Flemming and Sebastian Schütze (eds), *Ars naturam adiuvans. Festschrift für Matthias Winner zum 11. März 1996* (Verlag Philipp von Zabern: Mainz am Rhein, 1996), pp. 401–12.

51. Elizabeth Cropper, *The Ideal of Painting. Pietro Testa's Düsseldorf Notebook* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1984), pp. 209–10.

52. Cropper, *The Ideal*, pp. 162–3. For a summary of the legal ramifications of the artist's torture of the slave, see Andreas Rumpf, 'Parrhasios', *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 55, no. 1, January 1951, pp. 1–12.

53. Cropper, *Michelangelo Cerquozzi's Self-Portrait*, p. 408.

54. For previous bibliography on the painting, dated ca. 1510–1514, along with analysis of its attribution, see *Mantegna a Mantova 1460–1506* (Palazzo del Te: Mantua, 2006), p. 156.

55. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, pp. 580–1: ‘Soggiunse il marchese: “Le membra di questo tuo Santo non somigliano il vero, perché non mostrano essere tirate per forza, né quel timore che si deve imaginare in un uomo legato e saccato; ma dove tu voglia, mi dà il cuore di mostrarti quello che tu déi fare per compimento di questa figura”.’ Note that what is not unusual is Bonsignori’s selection of the *facchino*, or porter to serve as a model. In fact, the porter is a familiar figure in early modern art theory. He appears, albeit as a figure unsuitable for the depiction of Ganymede, in Alberti’s discussion of the correct depiction of the human form in Book 2.37 of *On Painting*. See Alberti, *Della pittura in Opere volgari* Cecil Grayson (ed.) (Laterza: Bari, 1973), vol. 3, p. 66: ‘Dicemmo ancora alla composizione de’ membri doversi certa spezie: e sarebbe cosa assurda. . . o se a Ganimede fusse la fronte crespa o le coscie d’un facchino . . .’. Dolce in his later *Dialogo* from 1557 evokes this personage, stating that while Michelangelo depicted porters, Raphael painted noblemen. Lodovico Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura intitolato l’Aretino*, in Paola Barocchi (ed.), *Trattati d’arte del Cinquecento, fra manierismo e Controriforma*, 3 vols (Laterza: Bari, 1960), p. 194: ‘Né dirò come già disse un bello ingegno, che Micheagnolo ha dipinto i facchini e Raffaello i gentiluomini’.

56. Paul de Man, ‘The Return to Philology’, in Paul de Man (ed.), *The Resistance to Theory* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1986), pp. 21–6. See also Barbara Johnson, ‘Philology: What Is at Stake?’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1990, pp. 26–30.

57. John Florio, *Queen Anna’s New World of Words* (Melch. Bradwood, for Edw. Blount and William Barret: London), p. 564.

58. *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca: con tre indici delle voci, locuzioni, e proverbi latini, e greci, posti per entro l’opera* (Giovanni Alberti: Venice, 1612), pp. 887–8: ‘Condurre, o fare accostare a se con violenza, strascinare. Lat. trahere’.

59. For examples of bound models in preparatory drawings, see Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, *Firenze, 1470–1480: disegni dal modello: Pollaiuolo, Leonardo, Botticelli, Filippino* (Università di Pisa, Istituto di Storia dell’Arte: Pisa, 1975), nos. 22, 23, 31, 33, 35, 40, 96, 106, 208.

60. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 4, p. 581: ‘Quando dunque ebbe il seguente giorno legato Francesco il facchino in quella maniera che lo volle, fece chiamare segretamente il marchese, non però sapendo quello che avesse in animo di fare. Il marchese dunque, uscito d’una stanza tutto infuriato con una balestra carica, corse alla volta del facchino, gridando ad alta voce: “Traditore, tu se’ morto, io t’ho pur colto dove io voleva”, et altre simili parole; le quali udendo il cattivello facchino e tenendosi morto, nel volere rompere



Fig. 11. Detail from Andrea Mantegna, *Martyrdom of Saint Christopher*, after 1449, fresco. Padua, Cappella Ovetari (Chiesa degli Eremitani). (Photo: Scala, Florence.)

posited by Jacopo de’ Barbari’s still-life of a partridge, an exemplary instance of *natura morta*? (Fig. 12).⁶⁶ But to underscore the larger point: the seemingly conventional and harmless practice of mimesis, even at the microlevel, can carry horrific overtones. In this respect, the oft-repeated adage of the artistic mastery of nature takes on sinister connotations. Nature, on this view, must at times be beaten into submission.

The Horror of Mimesis

The term *orrore* not only pertains to monstrous representations or the concepts of *fantasia* and *invenzione*. Horror can also arise from an overzealous effort, an obsession, to resemble the truth, infecting both the procedure and the end effect. The observation may well rescue Ridolfi’s Mehmed II from the charge of barbarity; the Sultan may have just been pointing to the horror necessary to realise depictions that convey that elusive ‘naturale effetto’. This, in turn, calls for assessing a broader claim, namely that realistic portrayal can be horrific in and of itself. There is something uncanny about naturalism, something disturbing about the manic and pressing desire to fix facial features precisely. It is no wonder that death masks constituted a notable category of early modern portraiture.⁶⁷ The taking of a portrait in wax was to be sure hardly horrible, it being a standard procedure upon the passing of a

sovereign, and in later periods, that of artists, poets, and composers.⁶⁸ Even so, it is worth noting that this practice calls attention to a paradox of sorts – heightened naturalism often comes at the expense of death. The famed *botti* or wax portraits of Lorenzo de' Medici mentioned in Verrocchio's biography – 'so lifelike . . . that they seemed to be living' – call attention to their devotional function, the artist's adherence to nature and most importantly for our purposes the terror of the Pazzi Conspiracy, the plot to assassinate and remove the Medici family from power.⁶⁹ Of course, if horror relates to this class of objects at all, it pertains to the circumstances of their production, their cause, concerning much less their naturalistic effect. Even so, a location such as Santissima Annunziata, as Francesco Albertini described the church, with its *boto* of Giuliano de' Medici, other wax figures, vases, statues of gold and silver, and sacred image of the Annunciation could have provoked for reaction of *sainte horreur*, the feeling expressed by later early modern viewers upon seeing other sacred spaces, such as the catacombs in Rome.⁷⁰

Thinking further along these lines and recalling Gentile's task in Istanbul, we might ask why some of the more 'realistic' paintings from the sixteenth century are the most gruesome as well, such as Andrea Solario's depictions of the severed head of John the Baptist (Fig. 13).⁷¹ Solario's mimetic achievement is certainly due in part to the constraints of the subject matter, the occasion to focus upon the individual part (face) instead of the whole (body).⁷² In an era where martyrs' relics were widely venerated, Solario's work 'probably aroused feelings of piety and remorse rather than horror'.⁷³ Yet, horror quickens this mimetic effect and vice versa. Its likely patron, Cardinal Georges d'Amboise, suffered from a number of ailments, thus calling for an interpretation of the painting as an object of devotion to ensure an improvement in health, as was often sought from the relic of the saint's head in Amiens.⁷⁴ However, is it impossible for the aesthetic of horrific mimesis, achieved through the artist's agency, to coexist with the function of personal devotion? What is noteworthy is how Solario insists upon depicting the cut, applied with subtle yet deliberate brushstrokes of red paint which suggest the flesh and tissue concealed beneath the skin. Conveying a sense of visceral immediacy, the cut is an index to the alacrity of decapitation – the steady victim waiting in dignified stillness, swift blow of the sword, the toppling of the skull from the skeleton.⁷⁵ Further contributing to this immediate presence is the painting's status as a close-up 'icon', an efficient image that compresses the story of John's censure of Herod, the machinations of Herodias and, finally, Salome's fateful request. Collapsed into a single moment is the Baptist's *vita* cycles found, for instance, on the west tympanum of the Rouen Cathedral, near where Solario was employed in Gaillon.⁷⁶ And underscoring this moment is the tension between the face's naturalism, especially the beard's finely articulated texture that verges on vivacity, and its inexorable silence, even tranquillity.⁷⁷ The clean cut and the stain of blood upon the beard's wiry hairs exemplify visceral immediacy and naturalism, qualities that are the hallmarks of the horror of mimesis, at least as Vasari's usage of the concept would seem to indicate. It should be conceded, however, that the analysis of these effects and impressions are but speculative afterthoughts. For like the spontaneous bristling of the skin, the horror of mimesis acts immediately, surges forth, only to leave contemplation and relief in its wake.

It would seem that horrific mimesis is not content with surface description alone. The pursuit of mimesis can correspond with plunging into the depths of



Fig. 12. Jacopo de' Barbari, *Still Life with Partridge, Steel Gauntlets and Cross-Bow Bolts*, 1504, limewood panel, 52 × 42.5 cm. Munich, Alte Pinakothek. (Photo: bpk, Berlin/Art Resource, NY.)

le funi con le quali era legato, nell'aggravarsi sopra quelle e tutto essendo sbigottito, rappresentò veramente uno che avesse ad essere saettato, mostrando nel viso il timore, e l'orrore della morte nelle membra stiracchiate e storte per cercar di fuggire il pericolo. Ciò fatto, disse il marchese a Francesco: "Eccolo acconcio come ha da stare: il rimanente farai per te medesimo".

61. Alberti, *On painting; and, On sculpture. The Latin texts of De pictura and De statua*, Cecil Grayson (ed.), (Phaidon: London, 1972), p. 75.

62. The scholarly literature has tended to take Bonsignori's sensitive portrait drawing of Francesco Gonzaga II (Dublin, National Gallery) as a graphic testament to the harmonious relationship between artist and his patron. See Ursula Barbara Schmitt, 'Francesco Bonsignori', *Münchner Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst*, vol. 3, no. 12, 1961, pp. 73–152.

63. On Vasari's sojourn in Mantua with particular reference to his interaction with Giulio Romano, see Patricia Lee Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History* (Yale University Press: London, 1995), pp. 11, 130–4, 209, 364.

64. See Wolfgang Kallab, *Vasaristudien* (K. Graeser: Vienna, 1908), p. 377; Rubin, *Vasari*, pp. 216–17.

65. On the arrow in the eye as a metaphor for the Albertian definition of perspective, see Michael Kubovy, *The Psychology of Perspective and Renaissance Art* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1986), pp. 1–16. See also Kristen Lippincott, 'Mantegna and the *scientia* of Painting', in Francis Ames-Lewis and Anka Bednarek (eds), *Mantegna and 15th-century Court Culture: Lectures Delivered in Connection with the Andrea Mantegna Exhibition at the Royal Academy of*

Arts, London, 1992 (Dept. of History of Art, Birkbeck College, University of London: London, 1993), pp. 45–55.

66. On the intersection between the practice of imitation and the etymology of *natura morta*, *nature morte* and *stillven*, see Eberhard König, 'Stilleben zwischen Begriff und künstlerischer Wirklichkeit', in Eberhard König and Christiane Schön (eds), *Stillben* (Reimer: Berlin, 1996), pp. 17–36.

67. See Julius von Schlosser, *Tote Blicke: Geschichte der Porträtbilderei in Wachs*, Thomas Medicus (ed.), (Akademie Verlag: Berlin, 1993); Roberta Panzanelli (ed.), *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure* (Getty Research Institute: Los Angeles, 2008), pp. 31–40. On the problem of physiognomic likeness in medieval tomb sculpture, see Julian Gardner, *The Tomb and the Tiara: Curial Tomb Sculpture in Rome and Avignon in the Later Middle Ages* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1992).

68. For a compilation of death masks from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, see Ernst Benckard, *Das ewige Antlitz: eine Sammlung von Totenmasken* (Frankfurter Verlag: Berlin, 1927).

69. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 3, p. 544: 'Le teste poi, mani e piedi, fece di cera più grossa, ma vòte dentro, eritratte dal vivo e dipinte a olio con quelli ornamenti di capelli et altre cose secondo che bisognava, naturali e tanto ben fatti che rappresentavano non più uomini di cera ma vivissimi'. Poliziano in his description of the conspiracy employs the word *terror* to describe the reaction of Giuliano's servant who upon witnessing the murder scene in the Florentine Cathedral attempted to hide himself. Angelo Poliziano, *Angeli Politiani v. cl. conjurationis pactianae anni mcccclxxviii. Commentarium* (s.n.: Naples, 1769), p. 18: 'qui Julianum sequebatur famulus, terrore exanimatus in latebras se turpiter conjecerat'. See also Poliziano, *Prose volgari inedite e poesie latine e greche edite e inedite*. . . (G. Barbèra: Florence, 1867), p. 95.

70. Francesco Albertini, *Memoriale di molte statue et picture di Florentia* (Antonio Tubini: Florence, 1510), p. 9: 'La chiesa della Annuntiata è devotissima et bella con molti vasi et statue d'oro et d'argento con voti et molte. statue di cera facte per mano di optimi artisti. Nella ricca, ornata et devotissima cappella della Madonna il capo della quale dal devoto pictore per divin mysterio fu trovato dipincto'. On the expression 'sainte horreur', see Edmond Huguet, *Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième siècle* (Librairie ancienne Édouard Champion: Paris, 1967), s.v. 'horreur': 'Il n'est âme si reveche qui ne se sente touchée de quelque reverence, à considerer cette vastité sombre de noz eglises. . . Ceux mesmes qui y entrent avec mespris sentent quelque frisson dans le cœur et quelque horreur,



Fig. 13. Andrea Solario, *Head of Saint John the Baptist*, 1507, oil on poplar, 0.46 × 0.43 m. Paris, Musée du Louvre. (Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.)



Fig. 14. Università di Padova; view of the Anatomical Theater, 1594, Padua. (Photo: Scala, Florence.)



Fig. 15. Johann Liss, *Judith with the head of Holofernes*, 1st tenth of the seventeenth century, oil on canvas, 126 × 102 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. (Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.)

hell. For students of anatomy in the early modern period, this was literally the case. As Roland Krischel has recently argued, the Padua anatomy theatre was likened in the sixteenth century to Dante's *Inferno* (Fig. 14).⁷⁸ Closer inspection of the human form would coincide with a metaphorical descent into the icy depths of hell. Early modern artists, too, would plunge into metaphorical depths to achieve naturalism as attested by the many anecdotes in art literature which describe the relentless pursuit of anatomical knowledge. These go beyond Condivi's tale of Michelangelo conspiring with the Prior of Santo Spirito to obtain corpses for dissection.⁷⁹ Vasari reports that a student of Giulio Clovio, Bartolomeo Torri, 'kept so many limbs and pieces of corpses under his bed (for study) . . . that they poisoned the entire house'.⁸⁰ From Baldinucci we learn that as a boy Cigoli suffers from amnesia and epileptic fits due to the skinned human bodies in Allori's studio.⁸¹ And though almost fainting from the stench, Goltzius compels himself during a time of famine in Rome to draw in the streets 'covered with corpses, some dead from hunger, others from disease'.⁸²

qui les met en defiance de leur opinion. MONTAIGNE, II, 12 (II, 367)'. See also Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel, contenant generalement tous les mots françois tant vieux que modernes* (Arnout and Reinier Leers: The Hague and Rotterdam, 1690), s.v. 'horreur': 'se dit quelquefois d'un simple mouvement de crainte ou de respect. Quand on descend à Rome dans les Catacombes, on est saisi d'une sainte horreur'.

71. Solario's bravura performances of the decapitated heads of St John the Baptist, the success of which is attested by the artist's execution of numerous versions of the subject could be understood as analogous to the 'genre' of artists depicting themselves either as Davids in self-portraits next to heads of Goliath, or vice-versa in Caravaggio's case. On Giorgione's self-portrait of David with the decapitated head of Goliath, see Jaynie Anderson, *Giorgione. Peintre de la 'Brieveté Poétique'*, Bernard Turler (trans.) (Lagune: Paris, 1996), pp. 313–9. See also Paul Holberton, 'To Loosen the Tongue of Mute Poetry: Giorgione's Self-portrait as "David" as a Paragone Demonstration', in Thomas Frangenberg (ed.), *Poetry on Art: Renaissance to Romanticism* (S. Tyas: Donington, 2003), pp. 29–47.

72. On the emphasis upon the depiction of the face in earlier art literature, see Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte*, Franco Brunello (ed.) (Neri Pozza Editore: Vicenza, 1971), pp. 196–200.

73. David Alan Brown, *Andrea Solario* (Electa: Milan, 1987), p. 165.

74. It is also suggested that the figure whose reflection appears upon the platter can be tentatively identified with d'Amboise as a variation upon a donor figure. John the Baptist also appears upon d'Amboise's seal (Rouen, Musée des Antiquités), yet another indication of the Cardinal's devotion to the saint. See Brown, *Solario*, pp. 161–7.

75. A beheading achieved in one clean blow depended upon the skill of the executioner and especially upon the composure of the victim who most often assumed the pose of seated prayer. See Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., 'Maniera and the Mannaia: Decorum and Decapitation in the Sixteenth Century', in Franklin W. Robinson and Stephen G. Nichols, Jr. (eds), *The Meaning of Mannerism* (University Press of New England: Hanover, 1972), pp. 67–104.

76. On the distillation of narrative scenes into a single image, see Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: the Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-century Devotional Painting* (Davaco: Doornspijk, 1984).

77. On the tension between the brutality of Solario's decapitated heads and their expression of 'delicious peace', see Julia Kristeva, *Visions*

Capitals (Réunion des musées nationaux: Paris, 1998), p. 78. See also Caroline Vander Stichele, 'Capital Re-Visions: The Head of John the Baptist as Object of Art', in Jonneke Bekkenkamp et al. (eds), *Missing Links: Arts, Religion and Reality* (LIT: Münster, 2000), pp. 71–88.

78. Roland Krischel, 'From Hell. Das Design des Paduaner Teatro Anatomico', *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, vol. 71, 2010, pp. 145–96.

79. Ascanio Condivi, *Vita di Michelagnolo Buonarroti*, Giovanni Nencioni (ed.) (S.P.E.S.: Florence, 1998), p. 15: 'Ebbe col ditto priore molto intrinseca pratica, sì per essere accomodato e di stanza e di corpi da poter far notomia, del che maggior piacer far non se gli poteva'. Note that marginalia written by Tiberio Calcagni, a collaborator in Michelangelo's workshop, affirms this statement: 'Disse quelli delle notomie come se li po[r]geva l'occasione'. See Caroline Elam, 'Che ultima mano?': Tiberio Calcagni's *postille* to Condivi's *Life of Michelangelo*, in Condivi, *Vita di Michelagnolo Buonarroti*, pp. XXI, XLI.

80. Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, Gaetano Milanesi (ed.) (G. C. Sansoni: Florence, 1878–1885), vol. 6, p. 16. Cited and discussed in Rudolf Wittkower and Margot Wittkower, *Born under Saturn; the Character and Conduct of Artists: a Documented History from Antiquity to the French Revolution* (Random House: New York, 1963), p. 55.

81. Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie dei professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua* (Per V. Batelli e compagni: Florence, 1845–1847), vol. 3, p. 235. Cited in Wittkower, *Born under Saturn*, pp. 55–6.

82. Baldinucci, *Notizie*, vol. 3, p. 183. Cited in Wittkower, *Born under Saturn*, pp. 56.

83. The lost version of the subject is known, however, through a print by Cornelius Galle. See *Johann Liss*, Augsburgers Rathaus, Augsburg, 1975, pp. 90–4. For a discussion of the numerous copies of Liss's composition, see Rüdiger Klessman, *Johann Liss: eine Monographie mit kritischem Oeuvrekatalog* (Davaco: Ghent, 1999), pp. 113–16, 128–9.

84. Joachim von Sandrart, *Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675: Leben der berühmten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister*, A.R. Peltzer (ed.) (G. Hirth Verlag: Munich, 1925), pp. 187–8.

85. Other notable examples include those by Juan de Flandres (Geneva, Musée d'art et d'histoire); Rogier van der Weyden (Berlin, Gemäldegalerie) and Jacopo Palma il Giovane (Venice, Chiesa dei Gesuiti).

However, this quest, some might say fever, to plunge into the depths of mimetic representation has a limit. Johann Liss's *Judith and Holifernes* is exemplary in this regard (Fig. 15). In their portrayals of the subject, Caravaggio, Agostino Carracci, the Gentileschi, and Liss's most immediate model for his composition, a now lost version of the subject by Rubens, stage Judith in the act of removing the head or triumphantly holding the severed part by the hair.⁸³ Liss, an artist who according to Sandart was 'unordentlich' and erratic in his working habits, proceeds one step further.⁸⁴ He demonstrates his mimetic capability by going beneath the surface, showing the windpipe and severed spine, and on either side, the arteries and jugular vein. There were many precedents for depicting a fountain of blood gushing forth from a headless figure – for instance, Giovanni di Paolo's representation of St John the Baptist (Chicago, Art Institute) demonstrates the decapitation that misses and preserves the Saint's jaw.⁸⁵ Even so, Liss pushes the headless figure into the foreground, and by so doing realises a breaking point in our story. Mimesis is here taken so far that it has negated its very subject matter, the head itself, leaving a bloody void in its stead. The significance of Liss's painting lies in this extremity. The function of horror and mimesis cannot stretch asymptotically towards infinity. It is an aesthetic effect that has limits. This very breaking point is a testament to mimetic horror's instability and, by the same token, its dynamism as an aesthetic effect. As such, it deserves a measure of the discursive space conventionally accorded to claims that perpetuate the notion of an ideal, immaculate, and antiseptic Renaissance.